



## **Tennessee Regulatory Authority**

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### **Consumer Advisories: Pre-paid telephone cards, Operator-Assisted calls**

**Nashville** – Due to the popularity of pre-paid telephone cards, officials with the Tennessee Regulatory Authority (TRA) would like to offer a few tips to consumers concerning their use.

First, when purchasing a pre-paid phone card, consumers should look for disclosures about additional fees. These fees may include surcharges, administrative fees, or per-call processing fees. For example, one advertisement for pre-paid cards touted its low 2.5 cents per-minute rate, but in small print disclosed a .25 cent per-call, processing fee. In the end, additional fees could significantly increase your per minute rate and reduce the number of calls you are able to complete.

Next, look for the company's identification, such as a name, address, and at the very least, a toll-free customer service number. If a customer service number is not listed or easily identified, it may be difficult to contact the company should you need assistance.

In addition, ask retailers, from whom the card was purchased, if they will back the product if it proves to be unsatisfactory or defective. Getting the backing of a retailer should prove to be helpful should any future problems arise.

Last, inspect the card to see what date the minutes expire. This simple step will help prevent you from being stuck with a card you cannot use.

"Pre-paid cards are attractive to some consumers for many reasons. Some like them because they eliminate the need to carry coins and can be used from almost any telephone. But there are risks involved when using them, and therefore they should be used with caution," says a TRA official.

### **Be aware of the high cost of making operator-assisted calls**

Consumers who make calls with the assistance of an operator should be aware of the charges involved when placing those calls.

The fees charged for person-to-person operator-assisted calls by Tennessee's five largest telephone service providers range between \$1.94 and \$4.90 per call. These fees do not include the per-minute rates that will apply during the talking time.

Callers should ask the operator how much the call will cost and about any upfront surcharges. Consumers also should consider other more economical calling options, such as direct dialing or calling cards before making an operator-assisted call.

*The Tennessee Regulatory Authority (TRA) provides regulatory oversight to Tennessee's investor-owned public utilities. Our jurisdiction includes approximately 1200 utility providers including the intrastate transmission of natural gas. For more information about the TRA, please visit our web site at [www.state.tn.us/tra](http://www.state.tn.us/tra).*

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*To file a consumer complaint, visit the TRA web site at [www.state.tn.us/tra](http://www.state.tn.us/tra)*

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